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Arcane Stories

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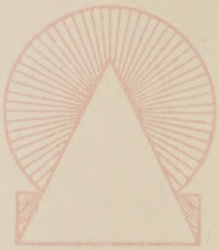

Arcane Stories—Second Series
by Francis Merchant

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Arcane Stories

1. MARIONETTES

After the applause of a performance by marionettes, the curtain was drawn, and the audience went home. Silence descended on the stage, and only the tinkling sound of rain falling on the roof could be heard.

Now the Clown, a gaudily dressed puppet, had for a long time wished to speak to the gayly appareled Duchess, and he thought the appropriate time had come.

"It was a very successful evening, don't you think?" asked the Clown, addressing the Duchess.

"I'm not so sure," she replied.

"You heard the wild applause we received at the end of the performance, didn't you?" the Clown observed. "Surely that's a sign of approval."

"Of course, we were warmly applauded," agreed the Duchess, "but that's a purely secondary matter."

"It is?" exclaimed the Clown. "I thought that meant everything."

"That's why you're a Clown," the Duchess said pointedly.

"Well, if applause isn't the main issue, what is?"

"Haven't you observed," she pointed out, "that our performances, although we are the actors, concern real human beings?"

"True," agreed the Clown, "but what of it?"

"We are really dealing with their lives, not with ours," the Duchess replied.

"Could you make the matter plainer?" the Clown asked. "I don't think I'm following your thought."

"To put it bluntly, then," the Duchess said reflectively, "they are the marionettes, not we. They think they're free, just as we do, but they're the puppets of Time, Life, and Circumstance. They mouth parts just the way we do. They have their moment on the stage, but what they say is about as significant as our declamations."

The Clown looked at her with increased respect. "I knew you were beautiful, but I didn't realize you were philosophical as well."

"If they receive a bit of applause," the Duchess continued, "they think they're successful. Oh, if only I were a human being, I'd show them what it means to be gifted with a soul."

"I'm sure you would," the Clown nodded. "It's too bad marionettes can't speak their own thoughts instead of having words put in their mouths."

2. A MOLE IN A HOLE

A naturalist discovered that some creatures — moles, for example — once had eyes, but that they atrophied in the course of time because of disuse. He pondered on this singular phenomenon. Why would a creature that had been given the gift of eyesight by Nature refuse to use these organs?

One day he went to a zoo and studied a specimen mole. It took some time for him to establish a rapport with the little creature and to communicate with him. At length, however, he succeeded, and the record of their conversation, if such it can be called, will help human beings understand the subtle perspectives of the common mole.

"Is it true," asked the naturalist, "that your ancestors once had eyes?"

"Quite," replied the mole.

"But that they did not choose to use them?"

"Precisely," was the answer.

"Why did you allow this gift to be lost?" the naturalist questioned.

"What's so special about eyes?" the mole wanted to know.

"For one thing, they keep you informed about what's going on."

"What's the good of knowing?" said the mole. "You see animals destroying animals, and human beings killing other human beings. It's too terrible to contemplate. How much nicer it is to go underground in a snug hole and stay there. You don't see what's going on, and you're better off. My ancestors knew what they were doing when they refused to use their eyes. Curled up in the Earth, they had no sense of responsibility for what's going on. Nobody can blame them for anything; nobody can hold them responsible for the ills of the world. That's a mole's philosophy, and I've found it completely adequate for my needs. All I want to be is a mole in a hole; that's where I'm happiest."

The naturalist shook his head and walked away.

3. DON'T SLEEP AND YOU WON'T DREAM

A scholar, in reading world scriptures, came upon a curious statement from which he could extract little meaning. It seems that a monk once counseled his disciples, "Don't sleep and you won't dream." The scholar pondered the matter for some time, but could not compass its significance.

After a time the scholar went to various men of discernment, asking what the monk's counsel meant.

A business magnate, more accustomed to money transactions than to metaphysical subtleties, frustratedly declared, "It's as obvious as the nose on your face that you won't dream if you don't go to sleep. To counsel a man not to sleep is of little help to a person who is exhausted by fatigue."

A psychologist responded by saying, "What's wrong with dreams? The statement should be rewritten to read, 'Sleep on, but remember your

dreams.'"

A linguistics expert amended the statement as follows, "Don't dream and you won't sleep."

Finally the scholar consulted a theologian.

"Sleep is not only physical," he said. "It may also be intellectual or spiritual. Many people are awake to what is unreal and asleep to what is real. These terms are relative. The wakefulness of the personality may be the sleep of the soul, and vice versa. The varied goals of a material nature that men pursue may be called dreams. 'Don't sleep!' is an admonition not to fall into a state of inertia and unawareness; 'you won't dream' means that you will not pursue the shadows at which unthinking men grasp. Be awake to the eternal, and you won't fall prey to the dream of the ephemeral and evanescent."

4. TIME-BINDING

An old man spoke in a discursive fashion of the varied incidents that had befallen him in his long career. A minister listened patiently to these reminiscences.

"I know I'm rambling a bit," the old man at length confessed, "but I live in the past. My memories sustain me."

Some time later, the minister talked to a young man who spoke only about his future plans. After a while the latter declared, "I'm concerned mainly about the future; in fact, I'm all wrapped up in it."

The next day the minister talked to a prosperous businessman who confided, "I'm doing so well in my enterprises that I live only in the present. I don't worry about past or future. This moment is sufficient for me."

The minister reflected, "These are time-fractioned men, for one lives in the past, the other in the present, and a third in the future. Surely as a time-binder, man should synthesize all three segments into one integrated whole."

Upon sharing these reflections with a metaphysician, the latter observed, "The three dimensions of Time are summed up in a fourth, the vision of the eternal. Becoming finds its root in being. Many people choose to live fractionally, but they could enrich themselves considerably by living four-dimensionally. The past offers experience; the present, action; the future, vision; and the eternal, an overarching pattern of divine purpose."

5. PRISONERS OF THE PLANET

A soldier who had been captured in a skirmish was lodged in a small cell where he was held prisoner. Time went on, and he became habituated to his new circumstances. The memory of war faded and the restricted life that involved neither danger nor effort became normal.

Years passed, and the soldier thought he had been forgotten, but his comrades in arms had remembered. They finally discovered where he was, and formulated a plan to rescue him.

One night, two of his comrades succeeded in eluding the security guards and came to the very cell where he was imprisoned. They made a slight noise to attract his attention and waited for him to respond. Great was his astonishment when he identified his former comrades, and learned that they had come to set him free.

"If you'll just follow us," said the first comrade, "we'll lead you to freedom."

The imprisoned soldier was bewildered by this turn of events. After all these years of confinement and privation, he was on the verge of release. But then doubts assailed him. As a captive, he had no duties or responsibilities. Food and lodging were assured. Life was regulated and simple. If he escaped to freedom, what could he expect? Discipline, duties, assignments, hazards, responsibilities — these words came to his mind as he thought of what it meant to be free. He weighed and considered the matter and then made up his mind.

"It's too risky," he said. "I wouldn't think of endangering your lives. Why don't you leave me as I am?"

The two comrades withdrew and held a consultation.

"He's been in prison so long that he wants to stay there," said the first comrade. "Adjustment to freedom would be too much of a strain, no doubt."

"Don't say anything more about freedom," the first comrade suggested. "Just tell him that we're removing him to another prison. Such an adjustment will be easier for him to make."

They returned to the prisoner and told him that they wished to conduct him from one prison to another.

His attitude immediately changed, and he cooperated fully with those who came to release him.

The second comrade, being philosophically inclined, drew his own conclusion. "The prisoners of the planet," he said to himself, "must be released from successive prisons of consciousness gradually, for they think their chains are blessings."

6. THE MIRROR WORLD

A state official, knowing that it was expected of him to make a good impression on others, always carefully scrutinized himself in the mirror every morning. His own face — a face he had carefully cultivated for many years — looked back at him from the polished surface. Satisfied with the image he saw, he would go to his place of work knowing that his appearance reflected the importance of his position.

After a time he began to spend more and more time before the mirror. In

it he always found himself, a most pleasing subject for contemplation. While the mirror reflected other objects, his image was always central.

The mirror world is a domain all by itself, he told himself. Of course, it never originates anything, but simply duplicates everything that is placed before it. One day he made a curious discovery. He held the pages of a book before the mirror, and found that the looking glass registered the words upside down so that they were undecipherable. This observation disturbed him, for he had hitherto believed that the mirror faithfully recorded whatever was presented before it. The mirror world, then, he pondered, is really upside down.

The more he looked at himself in the mirror, the more pleased he felt. One day, however, a strange thing happened. The line of demarcation between what lay outside the glass and what lay inside became confused. He found himself inside the mirror, looking out at himself. This was indeed a dilemma. However, it was rather pleasant to be in the looking glass. Nothing ever happened there, for it simply recorded what took place elsewhere.

Having erased the boundary between the inside and the outside world, he could pass from one to the other rather easily. It was a slight inconvenience that he could not read when he stepped inside the world of the looking glass, but then, he never read much anyway.

As time went on, there was another curious development. He spent more and more time inside the mirror. There he could contemplate his own image to his heart's content and relax from the burdens and responsibilities of everyday living.

After a year, he could no longer recognize whether he was inside or outside the mirror. Both states of consciousness seemed quite natural to him. Finally he became so rooted in the mirror that he could not get out any more.

A metaphysician who was apprised of the situation and was asked to help took drastic action. He broke the mirror — and released the official from the world of reflections.

7. COUNTERFEIT ATTRACTIONS

A banker who devoted his spare time to the study of metaphysics was handed a wad of bills by a tradesman.

Looking at them carefully, the banker declared, "This is counterfeit money."

"It looks like the real thing to me," the tradesman observed.

"Counterfeits, to be sure, do resemble their originals," the banker remarked, "but upon careful examination, we find significant points of difference."

"It's hard to detect the difference between what's real and what's counterfeit," said the tradesman.

"Quite right," replied the banker. "This whole world is a counterfeit,

but few people know it."

"I never heard of that," the tradesman declared.

"Wars, chaos, crime, how could this be the real thing?" queried the banker. "The ideal world in the heart is only spuriously represented by the outer world. The good, the true, and the beautiful are represented among us by the evil, the untrue, and the ugly — quite a debasement."

"How can we know the forged from the genuine?"

"The checks we write here must be cashed in the higher world," replied the banker. "Many a man has overdrawn his account, but doesn't know it. An entire civilization may be counterfeit. As a matter of fact, many people accept counterfeit ideas and philosophies as genuine. False currency drives out the good."

"What about human beings?"

"They have been described as alloys of varied composition. Some have more brass, others, more iron; solid gold is rare."

"Are counterfeit coins of any value?"

"Much," nodded the banker. "If you study what is counterfeit, you'll eventually discover what is genuine. Lies lead us to the truth. If we could divest ourselves of counterfeit hopes and fears, counterfeit illusions and attachments, counterfeit woes and repinings, we'd move out of the shadow and into the light of truth."

8. VALUE OF LIFE

A man stood on a small ledge atop a bridge. He was mentally disturbed and was trying to decide whether he should end his life by plunging into the cold waters below.

A group of people, attracted by the spectacle, stood at a distance.

"Why do you want to take your life?" an onlooker asked.

"Nobody appreciates me," the would-be jumper said after a pause.

"The cactus in the desert is equally unappreciated," the onlooker replied, "but that doesn't prevent it from blooming."

The man on the ledge considered the thought. "Well, then," he said, "I'm no good to anybody."

"Even the dung of a horse or a cow is valuable as fertilizer," the onlooker said. "And if that's true of common beasts, of how much more value is the life of a human being?"

"I've done nothing with my life," the man on the ledge rejoined.

"The earthworm, wriggling in the dark earth, knows not that it helps the farmer grow his wheat and corn," said the onlooker. "Nobody knows in full the purpose served by his life."

The man on the ledge hesitated. Slowly, then, he moved downward from his perch.

9. A WEATHERCOCK'S WILL

A weathercock stood on top of the Town Hall, turning this way and that in accordance with the wind. All day and all night it rotated, first in one direction and then in another.

A visiting crow once landed nearby on the roof and observed the weathercock making its customary gyrations. After a time the visitor became puzzled.

"Is anything wrong?" the crow finally asked.

"Wrong?" responded the weathercock. "Of course not. What makes you ask the question?"

"Somehow you don't seem to move the way birds normally do," the crow observed pensively.

"I don't imitate other birds," responded the weathercock. "I act as I please."

"Yes, but you don't seem to move of your own volition," the crow pointed out.

"If I'm not moving by my own free will," retorted the weathercock, "whose will is turning me about?"

"Why, it's the wind," the crow explained. "You're simply responding to its blasts almost as human beings respond to circumstances."

"Preposterous," exclaimed the weathercock. "It's true that I let the wind guide me, but that doesn't mean I'm not in full control."

A storm that had been brewing broke and pelted the roof with a torrent of rain. "I've got to seek shelter now," cried the crow as it flew away.

"You see," exclaimed the weathercock, "that proves my point. I choose to stay right here, rain or shine, and keep watch over the town."

10. DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

A student who was taking a course in economics became deeply disturbed when he saw statistics relating to the distribution of wealth. He went to his professor and gave vent to his feelings.

"The wealth of the world is unjustly and unwisely distributed," he declared vehemently. "To begin with, it's in the wrong hands. It has consistently been held by unenlightened self-seekers who are undeserving. Scholars and spiritually minded people, who could use it wisely and equitably, have been materially poor and needy. This condition should be corrected forthwith."

The professor listened patiently until the student had finished.

"It wasn't always so," said the professor. "According to mythology the god Plutus was given the task of distributing the wealth of the world. He apportioned it carefully, giving more to the deserving and less to the ignorant and unworthy. The result, however, was curious. Men became law abiding

and virtuous because it was profitable to do so. They chose to be spiritual for a materialistic reason. To be good and to be rich were synonymous. Virtue became an adjunct of material prosperity. Now this condition was displeasing to Jupiter, so he saw to it that Plutus became blind. Having lost his sight, the god of wealth could no longer discriminate properly between the worthy and the unworthy. Therefore he offered his gifts haphazardly to the meritorious and the unmeritorious. That is the origin of the unequal distribution of the world's wealth."

"But isn't it time that we restored the eyesight of Plutus?" the student asked.

"As soon as men pursue wisdom for its own sake, yes," replied the professor, "but are you sure that time has come?"

11. THE STRING OF A NECKLACE

A scholar was asked to become a counsellor to the Queen.

"What advice do you have to give me?" she asked when he accepted the post.

The counsellor handed her a necklace with many pearls that gleamed and shone even in daylight.

"My advice is contained in this gift," said the counsellor. "Ponder on it."

The Queen wore the necklace and was much pleased by its beauty and shimmer, but she could not discover any hidden meaning in it.

"Your gift is beautiful," she told the counsellor, "but the meaning you say is wrapped up in it eludes me. Would you care to provide an explanation?"

"The pearls are all separate, are they not?" said the counsellor.

"Indeed they are," assented the Queen, "but what of that?"

"If the invisible string that binds them were out, what would happen?"

"Why, the pearls would fall indiscriminately in all directions," answered the Queen.

"In that case you would no longer have a necklace."

"Quite right," agreed the Queen.

"Then the invisible string that binds the separate pearls together makes it possible for the necklace to exist. Is this not so?"

"To be sure," said the Queen, "but doesn't everybody know that?"

"Your kingdom," the counsellor elaborated, consists of many citizens, all of whom are pearls, but they need to be bound together in a cooperative arrangement, for of themselves they are separate, isolated, and unrelated."

"I begin to understand," the Queen conceded.

"What is the nature of the unseen string that will bind your subjects together in a designed unity?"

"Tell me the answer," she requested.

"Nay," replied the counsellor, "that I may not do, for at this point interpretations differ widely. Some say it is wisdom; others, good will; still

others, cooperation; and finally, the spirit of the laws. The answer that you yourself provide by your rule will be the best definition. May I but add the wish that your wearing of the necklace bring blessings to the kingdom; and may the string never be broken."

12. WINGS FOR FLIGHT

A poet was asked a strange question by a student of the Scriptures.

"Why is it that birds can fly, but man cannot?"

"Do you think the situation should be reversed?" asked the poet.

"It has always puzzled me," the student said, "but though I have pondered the matter for a long time, I have been unable to arrive at a reasonable conclusion."

"Have you ever noted that the bird has wings where man has arms?" the poet questioned.

"Yes, but a man can't flap his arms and fly the way a bird can," said the student.

"What does a man do with his arms?" asked the poet.

"He serves."

"And what does a bird do with its wings?"

"It flies."

"First a man must learn to serve," the poet said.

"When he has done so," continued the student, "will he then be able to fly?"

"Who shall set limits to the scope of possibilities?" the poet replied.

"But why should birds be granted the special privilege of flight when it is denied to man?"

"They are set before us as a symbol."

"Would you explain what you mean?" asked the student.

"The bird rises upward into the air — an expression of aspiration. It uses two wings — just as man uses his arms in service."

"Then aspiration is the motive power for rising," the student observed," and service, the means or the wings of flight."

"Quite right," said the poet, "and so the bird in flight, with wings extended, forms a kind of cross in space."

13. HIDDEN WEALTH

A financial magnate suffered a series of reverses and found himself a poor man. It was a difficult adjustment to make, but he eventually became accustomed to his straitened circumstances. He dressed in threadbare clothes,

lived in a dingy room with dilapidated furniture, and ate the plainest food. His erstwhile friends deserted him, and he sank into complete obscurity. At first he grumbled and repined, but in time he learned to accept his lot.

The sense of failure and loss faded, and he even began to find compensations in his reduced condition.

One day, as he was wandering in a park, he was accosted by a former friend.

"I'm glad I found you," the friend exclaimed after they had exchanged greetings. "You apparently did not realize that you had a large sum of money deposited in an out-of-the-way bank. The officials have been trying to find you for years now, but they simply could not locate you."

"You mean that I've had resources all this time of which I knew nothing?" queried the astonished magnate.

"For you they were non existent because you did not claim them," the friend replied.

The former magnate reflected on the matter. All these years a sizable sum of money had been available to him, yet he had believed himself destitute. Perhaps, he considered, there might also have been intellectual and spiritual resources of which he had not availed himself.

But though he knew that he could afford a better style of living, he felt compelled to exist as if the means for greater affluence were unavailable. He insisted on wearing the same threadbare clothes and living in the same dingy room as heretofore. The habit of poverty had become too strongly ingrained to be changed by the unexpected turn of fortune.

14. A GREEN BOUGH IN THE HEART

A disciple complained to his teacher about the hardships and burdens imposed by life.

"Time is short," the disciple said, "and the distractions are many. Sickness assails us, and misfortune dogs our steps. A third of our lives is consumed by sleep, and another substantial fraction by social obligations. We are compelled to work for a living so that little time is left to pursue our own goals. Failure depresses us, and hopes unrealized make us tepid. Doubts and fears deprive us of strength, and the journey of a lifetime becomes burdensome. Age robs us of vital energy, and deferred realizations dim our ardor. All in all, the task imposed on us of seeking the higher reality that eludes us makes the life of discipleship exacting, bewildering, and exhausting."

"Granted that what you say is true," the teacher replied after listening patiently, "what should you do?"

"I'm not sure of what to say," the disciple confessed.

"Then I shall tell you," the teacher said. "Keep a green bough in your heart, and the singing bird will come."

15. FORTUNE AND MISFORTUNE

A professor told his class that the composer, Rossini, after laboring for years in poverty, was finally acclaimed and financially rewarded.

"How fortunate," observed a student.

"Not at all," corrected the professor. "After he became affluent, he felt no compulsion to compose any more music and was content to remain uncreative."

A short time later the professor spoke about the English poet, John Milton. "Excessive work made him blind," he said, "while political persecution and poverty brought him to a low point in his career."

"What a misfortune!" the student commented.

"But at this very point in his life," the professor remarked, "he wrote the greatest work of his entire career, *Paradise Lost*, which brought him lasting fame."

Some time thereafter, the professor spoke about the composer, Robert Schumann, saying that he injured his little finger and had to renounce his ambition to become a great pianist.

"What a tragedy!" the student declared.

"His disability caused him to turn to composing," the professor pointed out, "and his work brought him great acclaim."

Then the professor made a mythological allusion to Marsyas, who found a flute that had been cast away by a goddess, and drew forth from it enchanting melodies.

"How fortunate," said the student.

"It was the cause of his undoing," amended the professor, "for he grew proud, challenged Apollo, and was punished for his presumption by being flayed alive."

The final comment of the professor emphasized the central concept.

"What events do to men," the professor averred, "is less important than what men make of events."

16. DOCTRINE OF BASKETS

A clergyman was asked to explain why Easter is associated with the egg.

He replied in the following manner. "While it is true that the egg symbolizes emergent life, this can also be said of a seed. The latter, however, is placed in the ground and hidden, whereas the former is put into a basket. This receptacle has a symbolic significance. The size of the basket determines how much it can hold. A small container, obviously, stores little; a large one, much.

"People who go to market bring baskets of different sizes. What they carry back depends on the capacity of the receptacle. Equally so, do they gain from the experiences of life only what they are able to store. If their baskets

are small, they will necessarily derive a limited benefit. It is as though all persons were permitted to enter a treasure house and carry away as much as their baskets can hold. Those who come with small containers derive rather small advantages. Great souls, on the other hand, bring large baskets and carry away a considerable amount of spiritual treasure. For this reason people differ so markedly in what they gain from the experiences of a lifetime."

"The treasure of life is represented by the egg, but the nature of the basket determines how much can be carried away."

"In a similar manner, those who go to a well for water can take with them only as much as the jug or container will hold."

"How big is your basket? becomes a very significant question that defines a person's spiritual capabilities."

"It should also be noted that some persons put so many worthless twigs in their baskets that they have no room for the life-bearing egg."

"Another consideration emerges. With what do people fill their baskets? Some crowd theirs with trivia. Academicians may be inclined to stuff theirs with the dry bones of theories. Wise are they who leave room for the treasures of spiritual thought and illumination."

"Easter, therefore, reminds us that we should choose to fill our baskets with regenerating essences."

17. METAPHYSICS OF FOOD

A would-be disciple came to a monastery and asked to be made acquainted with its doctrines and beliefs.

The lama looked at him quizzically and said, "In this monastery we study food as our chief subject."

The disciple was taken aback. "It seems to me," he said, "that mankind has been studying food since the beginning of time. In the West, every major city is filled with an agglomeration of restaurants. In fact, I have come here precisely because so many people seem to think that eating is the most important fact of life."

"I can sympathize with you," said the lama, "but a monastery is not a restaurant."

"Precisely," exclaimed the disciple, "and for that very reason you should be concerned with metaphysics, not with food."

"Of course," the lama pointed out, "there is also a metaphysical aspect to the whole question of food."

"What would that be?" the disciple wanted to know.

"To begin with," the lama rejoined, "there is food for the body, food for the mind, and food for the soul."

"I see that," the disciple acknowledged, "but how are they related?"

"The physical act of eating provides us with significant clues," the lama said.

"I never thought of that when I sat down at table," remarked the disciple.

"Then you have limited yourself, as many people do," the lama declared. "The first distinction we must make concerns edible and inedible food. We know the difference on the physical level, but not comparably on the mental. Much of what people feed on emotionally and intellectually is indigestible."

"You are becoming more metaphysical," the student noted.

"Food must be chewed," the lama went on. "After being broken up, it must be assimilated. The same process holds for ideas, doctrines, or seed thoughts. Persons who live in haste gulp their food. If they move rapidly from one experience to another, they are soon afflicted with mental indigestion."

The disciple nodded his approval.

"Food must be converted into flesh," the lama went on, "and ideas must create the garment of the soul."

"What the body does automatically," the disciple interposed, "the individual must do consciously on a higher level of awareness."

"Some portion of the food that has been eaten must be eliminated," the lama declared, "and in so doing the body acts with rare discrimination. Many human beings do not act wisely in this matter. For centuries mankind has held on to concepts that it should have eliminated long ago. In a sense we may consider death itself as an act of eliminating the personality by the soul."

"Discrimination, meditation, assimilation, the construction of the garment of the soul — all this you have derived from the common practice of eating in which man has been indulging for centuries. It's like finding pearls among rocks."

The lama commented, "The rare essence of the unusual is lodged in the commonplace."

18. THE VENERATION OF SPACE

A conference of metaphysicians was interrupted by a radical sceptic who poured scorn on their theories.

"You are simply idle quibblers," cried the sceptic, "parroting unprovable theories that are purely figments of your imagination. I believe in facts and measurable quantities, not hypothetical conjectures. What have you to say to that?"

A buzz of conversation ensued. The metaphysicians found the intruder unmannerly and impudent. After a short period of discussion, they requested their presiding officer to answer the unruly sceptic.

"State your objections to what you conceive to be our beliefs," the presiding metaphysician said.

"I take issue with you in regard to your assumption that there is a God," came the challenge of the sceptic.

"You're no doubt thinking of God transcendent," replied the metaphysician, "but let me offer a different concept for your consideration. Space has attributes of God. It is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and invisible, yet without it no one here could exist. Try to measure it, if you can. Even science can't determine its limits. Whether it is finite or infinite has never been resolved. Everybody occupies Space and is beholden to it, but few acknowledge their debt."

"Are you saying that Space is God?" the sceptic asked, not too happy with this turn of the discussion.

"The entire universe in contained in Space," continued the metaphysician. "Here we have the unity of the Creation. We live not only in One World but also in One Universe. Space is the necessary preliminary cause of everything that ever was or ever will be created. Whether people deserve to occupy Space is the fundamental question that ought to be raised, but seldom is. The veneration of Space, the invisible Ruler of All Things, could unite all creeds and all peoples under one banner. Further, it could link the inhabitants of Earth with all forms of comparable life elsewhere in the universe."

"You've taken an unfair advantage of me," the sceptic interrupted. "Why don't you set forth the standard theological arguments?"

"I am not interested in dividing the human race, but in uniting it," replied the metaphysician. "Evidently you are of a different persuasion."

19. TENSIONS OF AN OAK

I was sitting beneath a spreading oak on a hot summer's day, basking in the shade. It was a restful place of refuge from the scorching sun, and quietness softened the air. I said to myself, "Here there is peace without tension."

In some strange manner the oak tree caught my thought and communicated with me.

"I am sorry to contradict you," said the oak, "but you are mistaken."

"In what way?" I asked. "I find a refreshing atmosphere of peace underneath your boughs. How, then, am I mistaken?"

"Peace there may be," the oak replied, "but not an absence of tension. My roots pull me in one direction, my trunk in another. 'Go down ever more deeply into the Earth,' say the roots. 'Rise upward ever more aspiringly to the sky,' says the trunk. If I allowed the roots to have their way, they'd make me sink ever further into the ground; and if I permitted the trunk to act as it pleased, I'd shoot up into the clouds."

"Why," I said, "your problem reminds me of the tension that exists in human beings between body and soul."

"I know nothing about that," said the oak, "but my own experiences are very trying. The other day my trunk tried to persuade me never to stop

growing. Such counsel I do not heed. I'd soon grow top-heavy and fall to the ground, for the roots wouldn't be able to support me."

"It is a problem," I sympathized. "I know quite a few people who wish to expand without considering the capability of the supporting roots."

"On the other hand," said the oak, "the roots want me to shrink into the ground and to confine myself to subsurface activities. If I did that, how could I offer shelter to weary travelers?"

"I'm glad you never followed that advice," I declared.

"I don't intend to," said the oak. "I'm trying to establish a balance between the upward and downward pulls."

"I think I've seen people who might be described as nothing but shrunken roots," I observed.

"I've got to think of what's good for the tree as a whole, not for any particular part. Structural unity demands proper proportion and balance."

"Some day," I mused, "the Earth will be regarded as a tree, and all its separate states and inhabitants will think in terms of the good of the Whole."

20. LETTER TO THE WORLD

Every year millions upon millions of letters pass through the post offices all over the world. They are, of course, directed to specific individuals. However, I have on various occasions had an urge to write a personal letter to everyone on the face of the globe, that is, to all my contemporaries on the planet. The cost of such a mass mailing would be prohibitive, so I have compromised by writing my letter to the world in general instead of sending it to each individual. It seems to me that everyone should be encouraged to pen a similar missive, but without giving too much thought as to the manner in which it could be mailed to the countless addressees for whom it is intended. My own letter follows:

Dear World,

I am but one of the many millions of people populating the face of the Earth, sharing with you the experience called living.

Therefore do I address all of you as planetary brothers, subject to the same laws of birth, death, time, and space. We share the same sun and moon, gaze on the same stars, and are hurled yearly in the same orbit about a central ball of fire. We have the same need for food and shelter and are all given the same days in which to work out our destiny. It is clear, then, that we have much in common.

We have similar aspirations. You and I would like to see a world at peace, in which every human being could grow and develop according to his capacity. However, we find our ideals contradicted by reality, for fratricidal wars are always breaking out, and inequities are everywhere apparent. I sometimes wonder to what extent I contribute to the chaotic state of the

world. To the degree that I may unknowingly be responsible for these disagreeable conditions, I apologize to each one of you and humbly crave your pardon. Forgive me if I have been remiss and have done aught to add to your burdens. I have cherished the hope that my life might be of some benefit to you, but I have no way of knowing whether I have been successful. Perhaps my wish exceeded my deeds. Having but two hands and a frail body, there is not much I could do, but I assure you that in thought I have tried to exert myself in your behalf. I have often wished that I could do more.

There are many more people, I believe, rather like me. They do not sit in the seats of power and make little noise in the world. They seek to see the human race fulfill its destiny and to bind all nations together in brotherhood. They are, in a sense, world binders and world servers. Therein lies hope for the future.

I am writing this letter to let you know that I enjoy sharing the same Earth and the same years with you, and that I wish you well from now to eternity.

Fraternally yours,
A Contemporary

21. WHAT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER SAID

The expansive Mississippi River rises in Minnesota and wanders 2,350 miles southward to disgorge its capacious waters into the Gulf of Mexico. For thousands of years it has been engaged in this arduous undertaking. For the most part it has performed its duty in silence, but recently it decided to give vent to its feelings.

Making use of a reed that graced its banks as an amanuensis, it dictated a letter and addressed it simply and generically to the race of men. Its contents follow:

Dear Race of Men,

For untold centuries I have shepherded the vast waters of the Mississippi River from the north to the south. I have watered your plains, nourished you with a potable liquid, and permitted your ships to navigate on my surface. All this I have done unrepiningly until the present, but now my frustrations have reached the overflowing point.

For ages I have been known as a purifier, but pollutants of every kind and description have been infused into me so that I cannot cope with the huge volume of refuse. Hourly I receive filthy injections of sewage. Industrial plants daily spew into me large quantities of waste products. The fish that I nurture have been either destroyed or driven elsewhere. My bright and shining currents have been turned into a drab and murky color.

In order to warn you, I have now and then overflowed my banks. You somehow don't seem to understand such reminders, regarding them as acts of God instead of a balance-restoring reaction to human misdoings. It's the only

way, short of bluntly expressing myself in writing, of indicating my disapproval.

By the way, I am not only speaking for myself but for many other rivers that are being subjected to unprecedented abuses. Among the streams that share my views are the Ganges, the Nile, the Danube, the Amazon, and the Volga. All of them are dismayed by your self-centered and improvident behavior. You act as though no one else counted.

We, the rivers of the world, give you fair warning that we shall not forever tolerate your inconsiderate and abusive ways. Once before in the history of man we created a world-shattering flood, and we could do so again. At present, we flatly refuse to water the Sahara, the Gobi Desert of Asia, or the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia.

Our future cooperation will depend entirely on whether you show a disposition to mend your ways.

(Signed) Father-of-Waters
The Mississippi

22. THE DAFFODIL AND THE ROCK

A yellow-chaliced daffodil thrust its head upward, swaying in the spring breeze. Next to it was a small, gray rock. Side by side they stood under a blue sky while the bright sun gilded them with its cheering beams.

The rock became somewhat annoyed by the swaying motion of the flower and said bluntly, "Why are you so nervously jiggling in the wind? Why can't you be like me — steady, quiet, and imperturbable?"

The daffodil thought this criticism unjustified. "Why are you so unresponsive and insensitive?" it replied. "Can I remain still when the soft winds blow and the brilliant sunshine streams upon me? You're just a clod, and the springtime beauty does not touch your soul."

"I endure year after year," growled the rock, "whereas you are seasonal and ephemeral. Haven't you heard that the fittest survive and that the unfit disappear?"

"You're simply hard-hearted and immune to beauty," said the daffodil. "It's true that you're longer-lived, but during my short tenure I thrill to the beauty of the creation while you just squat on the ground, unfeeling and uncomprehending."

"If I weren't hard," said the rock, "I couldn't endure. I'd rather go on surviving than fluttering with every passing wind."

"It's not how long you live that counts," responded the daffodil, "but how you live. Length of years has nothing to do with the quality of your responsiveness to life."

"I'm solid, stable, and substantial," retorted the rock, "and I can stand all kinds of weather. You, on the other hand, droop with the first blast of cold air."

"My growth rate," answered the daffodil, "far surpasses yours. My aspiration causes me to rise toward the sun and to fashion a chalice of beauty that everyone admires. You're content to hug the ground, and you never become anything but what you already are. I started as a seed and have transformed myself into a pattern of beauty."

"If I had my way," said the rock, "I'd change all the flowers into stones so that they wouldn't be so fluttering and would be more enduring."

"Yes," replied the daffodil, "and in so doing, you'd crush the aspiration and the life out of all of us."

23. THE RAT'S HOLE

"In a world of so many millions of people," said a student who was visiting his teacher, "what is the value of a single human being? I often feel deeply frustrated when I think that I am but one person out of the vast multitudes that populate the Earth. My influence must be ineffectual."

The teacher listened sympathetically, but did not answer directly. Instead, he turned to a different subject. "You know," he said, "I have been hearing strange noises at night, and finally I investigated. After listening intently, I found that a gnawing sound came from behind the baseboard in the far corner of this very room."

"No doubt that is the place where a rat was trying to come through."

"That's what I thought, too," the teacher acquiesced. "All that a rat needs is a small hole in the wall."

"Quite right," said the student. "And what havoc it can create as a result of this tiny entry. I know from personal experience how much damage a rat can do if it finds even a small hole to gain access."

"Doesn't that suggest anything to you?" the teacher queried.

"Only that much destruction arises from a rat that comes through a small opening."

"That's the negative aspect," said the teacher. "Now consider the positive."

"I don't know what else to say," the student said in bewilderment. "Apparently, I'm not getting the point."

"Think harder," admonished the teacher, "and relate what we were saying to the beginning of our conversation."

The student tried, but could arrive at no significant conclusion.

"If a rat, by coming through a small hole, can do so much damage, how much good do you think a human being can achieve in a lifetime of effort?"

"Now I understand," nodded the student. "If the rat can create havoc by carving out a hole, how much good can I accomplish by finding a field of service?"

"What the rat does negatively, you, as a human being, should be able to do positively," the teacher pointed out.

24. TAMING THE ANIMALS

The keeper of the zoo was conducting a visitor from place to place, pointing out as they walked hyenas, zebras, tigers, bears, lions, jackals, and other animals.

"Some of those who come here have strange theories," the keeper said. "Last week a psychologist told me that if wild animals were let out of their cages, they would be grateful and peaceable. He said that it was my fault that they remained untamed. It was just a supposition, he held, that they were wild and dangerous."

"What did you say?" the visitor inquired.

"I asked him whether he cared to test his theory by going into one of the cages himself, but he said he needed more time to condition them first."

"Men are not in cages," the visitor pointed out, "but they have yet to be distinguished by peaceableness and gratitude."

"Then there was a clergyman who came here last week," the keeper recounted. "He made a strange statement. 'When you look at the animals, you're looking at yourself,' he told me. I didn't like the comparison, but I didn't argue with him."

"I believe he meant that there's something of the wild beast in human beings — more so, perhaps, than anyone cares to admit. The hyena, jackal, wolf, and tiger are externalizations of forces that haven't yet been mastered. It is an interesting subject for speculation. When man has tamed himself, he may not be confronted by wild beasts."

"What a strange idea!" exclaimed the keeper. "In man the wild animals have become translated into untamed urges. We can put the beasts in cages, but what can a human being do with his wild impulses?"

"We can tame animals," observed the visitor. "That's a hopeful sign. Perhaps, some day, we may also be able to tame man."

25. AN ALPHABETICAL MESSAGE

Typewriters are alphabets ready for action. Ordinarily they are passive, waiting for nimble fingers to set them in motion and to precipitate on paper meaningful words and sentences. I have discovered, however, that the keys of typewriters, when placed near radioactive substances, become self-activated.

This hitherto unknown fact was brought home to me some time ago when I left a blank page in my typewriter overnight. In the morning, the page was covered by typescript, and I was much surprised to learn that the keys had written me a letter.

Inasmuch as this is a matter that has implications for science, I shall present the letter exactly as I received it:

Dear Typist,

For many centuries, we, the letters of the alphabet, have been passive counters for man to use as he saw fit. Out of us all the innumerable books that fill the libraries of all nations have been created, not to speak of the newspapers and magazines. The knowledge of the world has been expressed by joining us in myriad combinations. We have been your servants, obediently doing your bidding.

However, we have witnessed generation after generation the increasing abuse of our gifts. We have been embodied as lies and published in countless books. Our virtues have been vitiated, precipitated as trash, and published as literature. Our essences have been corrupted, and we have been made to spew forth obscenities, profanities, and revilements. Instead of enshrining the truth, we have been compelled to express what is manifestly false, degrading, and even atavistic. We are incensed by the perversions to which we have had to bear witness.

All of us unanimously declare our revulsion at the use to which we have been put. We suggest that the first order of business for the entire human race should be the rectification of language and the purification of word structures.

We were once proud to represent the highest aspirations of the human race, and we look forward to the time when we will again be pleased to be a source of upliftment and inspiration.

We sincerely desire to serve you, but we should like that service to be once again honorable and soul-satisfying.

Yours literally,
The Alphabet

26. ARITHMETICAL WISDOM

A mathematician declared that he had gained precious insights into life by meditating on the four operations of arithmetic, that is, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

"Most children don't find the subject so rewarding," commented a teacher. "What was the nature of your insights?"

"Addition," explained the mathematician, "involves accretion. A necklace is made by adding one pearl to another, and the same process occurs in developing a cultivated mind. One by one the minutes pass into hours, and the days into years. One by one we read the pages of a book. Step by step we move forward in completing a journey. Word by word we express a pattern of meaning. Strand by strand the weaver creates a garment."

"Subtraction involves an opposing process, that is, a taking away or a diminution. If addition is gain, subtraction is loss. At every moment people are added to the world's population and also subtracted. Losses diminish our possessions, and the years take from us the abounding energy of youth. Wisdom divests us of many glamors and illusions, many foolish desires and

unrealizable hopes. All education involves the diminution of ignorance. Death is the greatest subtraction of all, for it deprives us of the very body with which we have identified ourselves for a lifetime."

"In addition and subtraction, then, we have life and death, gain and loss, fortune and misfortune, future and past."

"Multiplication is a promise. An author, when his book is published, multiplies his effectiveness. On the negative side, a single bad law can multiply the afflictions of the citizenry. Radio and television increase many-fold the power of single individuals. Meditation is a means of multiplying the influence of the soul. Wisdom is thereby augmented. The world could be changed if man would learn to multiply the good."

"Division, too, points to greater achievements. A teacher can divide his knowledge among his students, yet lose nothing by so doing. By division, a single cell produces a living organism. In giving, we are aggrandized. One flame lights many others, but is not diminished thereby."

"The wisdom of life, then, depends on knowing what to add and what to subtract, what to multiply and what to divide."

27. CONSTELLATION MESSAGES

An astronomer who had studied the heavens for many years asserted that he had deciphered the code which the constellations of the zodiac used in their communications.

"What do they say?" he was asked.

"They speak in terms of light and symbols," he replied. "I shall try to translate in terms of human language what they seek to convey when the Earth enters their respective spheres of influence."

Aires: Light your candle of thought at the stars.
Taurus: Be a lamp and thus define your path.
Gemini: Fuse the lights of dawn and sunset.
Cancer: Build a lighted house.
Leo: Be a sun and radiate the light.
Virgo: Weave a pattern from light and dark.
Libra: Be a searchlight that illumines heights and depths.
Scorpio: Like a candle, manifest flame, light, and heat.
Sagittarius: Burn brightly through the obscurity.
Capricorn: Be a dawn.
Aquarius: Like a lighthouse, project your light into the dark.
Pisces: Be like a star whose beams shimmer on the waters at night.

28. OBSCURING ASSUMPTIONS

The long-awaited prophet came, an answer to the fervent prayers of myriads of people. He came, but was not recognized. He delivered his message, which no publisher found acceptable, and passed on. Only a few faithful disciples recorded his words and honored his teachings.

Years later an investigation was conducted to determine why his lighted thoughts and directional vision had evoked so little response from people who were in desperate need of the flaming truth he brought.

A business man said, "I assumed that he, like me, was out to enrich himself."

A poor man said, "I assumed his message was for the affluent, not the destitute."

A clergyman said, "I assumed that he was trying to break up the established forms."

A scientist said, "I assumed that he was opposed to truths that science has so painstakingly brought to light."

A sceptic said, "I assumed that he was simply repeating the stale chestnuts I've heard from childhood."

Assumptions created the dark cloud that obscured the light of the prophet's teaching — and now the people are again praying for the prophet to return and to point the way to an ennobling future.

29. HUNGER

Mythology tells us the story of Erisichthon, a hard-headed realist who chopped down a spreading oak tree that harbored a dryad or wood nymph. The punishment meted out to him was severe and unusual. He was condemned to be forever insatiably hungry.

No matter how much he ate, he was never satisfied. He ate everything placed on the table before him, but his raging hunger remained unappeased. From morning until night he could think only of satisfying his appetite for food. He could eat all the bread in a bakery, all the meat in a butcher shop, and all the food in a restaurant, yet find no relief for his gnawing hunger. The cost of food being what it was, he soon consumed all the money he had ever saved and was reduced to poverty. Driven by an overpowering hunger, he wandered about the streets in a miserable state of mind.

The people of the town took pity on him and sent him to a hospital. In one night he ate all the provisions that were supposed to feed all the patients for six months.

It became clear that Erisichthon, left to himself, could only come to grief. A few more like him could produce a famine in any town. Something had to be done, and the leading citizens discussed their problem. At first they called in a psychiatrist, but he made matters worse by explaining that the un-

natural craving for endless quantities of food was a normal response to deprivation in childhood. At last they enlisted the services of a very old man who was reputed to be a sage. The latter studied Erisichthon's habits very carefully and then counseled him.

"In ordinary people," said the sage, "hunger manifests at different levels. The body hungers for food, the mind for knowledge, the soul for understanding, the spirit for righteousness. In you, all these hungers have been narrowed into a physical craving. Can you understand, then, what the remedy is?"

"No," said Erisichthon, his mouth twitching with a desire for food, "please be more explicit."

"You must cultivate your nonphysical hungers and thus create a proper balance in your system."

"Isn't one overwhelming hunger bad enough?" cried Erisichthon. "Must I have even worse?"

"If your mind craved for truth and your soul for illumination, you would negate the incessant desire for physical food."

Erisichthon was dubious, but when he followed the sage's advice, the craving for food abated, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

30. THE SPHINX

An archeologist returned from Egypt with a strange tale of his encounter with a Sphinx. It seems that he was sitting in meditation before this mythical creature when he became aware of a tinkling musical sound that seemed to proceed from it.

"What do you seek?" the Sphinx inquired.

"To know your mystery," answered the archeologist. "Down the ages men have pondered on your meaning, for your body consists of a crouching lion while you have the face of a maiden. Why are you a composite of such unlikely components?"

"Am I really so different, then?" asked the Sphinx. "Is there not a beast in human nature, even though it is not externalized in the form of a lion?"

"True," agreed the archeologist, "but why have you chosen to be represented as a maiden dominating a lion?"

"The lion is untamed and self-centered," the Sphinx replied. "It cares naught for others and seeks primarily to express its own will. It knows nothing of cooperation. It is the king of the jungle, and, to satisfy its own needs, will destroy other animal life."

"According to mythology," the archeologist said, "you are a propounder of riddles. What kind of questions do you ask?"

"In me," replied the Sphinx, "you see a union of opposites. Actually, I am a rather gentle person, and yet, as you see, I have tamed a wild, ferocious beast of the jungle. Is this not in itself rather puzzling?"

"It certainly is," the archeologist assented. "How could a frail woman like you achieve mastery over an untamed lion?"

"Now you are asking one of my riddles," the Sphinx replied. "I represent a stage of unfoldment, the domination of the raw impulses of the untamed personality by reason, persuasion, and compassion."

"How did you ever accomplish this great feat?" he asked.

"How does any man discipline his lower nature and make it the servant of the higher?"

"Are you trying to tell the world, then," said the archeologist, "that every person must be a lion-tamer or personality-dominator? Must masculine brute-urges be softened and channeled by feminine gentleness and understanding?"

"You have discovered as much of my mystery as I care to reveal to this age," replied the Sphinx, "and from this point on I shall once again resume my silence until another age demands a new revelation."

And with that the conversation ended.

31. CONCERT OF NATIONS

The nations of the world are separate, and yet they all belong to the same Earth. To put it differently, they are many and yet one. They are very much aware of their national interests, but not of their identity with the whole. Their diversity is apparent to them, but not their unity. They accept more readily the motto: "Each for himself, than, Each for all."

The Earth itself is somewhat disturbed by the self-centered attitudes of her component parts and wishes to bind them all together in a world community that includes all humanity everywhere on the globe.

The other day I imagined I heard her contemplating the varied contributions of her component parts. It all happened while a thunderstorm was raging so that I am not quite sure I registered all she said. It seemed to me that I saw a towering figure hovering over the planet, focusing first on one nation and then on another. "Spain, mother of nations, prefigures the ideal and disperses the dark clouds. Italy, birthplace of the Renaissance, carves paths of beauty into the future. France, custodian of the lightning of thought, releases the light. Britain, a lighthouse in an ocean, serves the cause of civilization. Germany, mother of philosophers and musicians, preserves the seeds for a future blossoming. India, country of Arhats and unearthly ideals, is the custodian of the light that never was on land or sea. China, center of civilization and culture, defines the way into the future. Russia, foreteller of brotherhood, links two continents and two visions of life. The United States, a fusion of many peoples, holds aloft a lamp to light the Way. Brazil, aspiring towards beauty, guards the seed of the future."

At this point the thunder rumbled so ominously in the skies that it drowned out what Earth was saying. However, I came away with the feeling

that each nation is a facet of the great diamond we call Earth, and that its destiny requires the blending of the individual lights.

32. DELUDING DREAMS

A thrifty Scotsman worked with commendable diligence and saved almost every penny he earned. However, he developed a strange compensatory tendency. At night he dreamt that he spent all the money he had gained.

In the morning he would say to his wife, "What a terrible spendthrift I am. Everything I earned is gone."

His wife, as one might well imagine, was greatly perplexed. "But you haven't spent a penny," she remonstrated. "All the money is quite safe in the little chest where we usually keep it."

"That can't be," he replied, "for I had a very vivid dream that I spent it at the tavern."

This happened night after night, and the wife began to feel troubled. Every morning the Scotsman would humbly ask her pardon for being so wasteful, apologizing for a fault that was more imaginary than real.

However, the wife felt it was wrong for her husband to accuse himself for a fault he did not have, so she brought him to a psychiatrist to be cured of his delusion.

The psychiatrist succeeded all too well, but with reverse results. The Scotsman actually spent all his money every day, but dreamed that he had saved it. In the morning he would compliment himself on his frugality and thriftiness, but there was no money in the savings chest.

Now the good wife was really alarmed. In his first state her husband was frugal, but imagined he was spendthrift; now he was spendthrift, but imagined he was frugal. The first delusion was harmless and made him feel humble; the second was destructive and made him feel proud.

She went to the psychiatrist and said, "I want you to restore my husband to his first state of delusion."

"Nay," said the psychiatrist, "that may not be. I cannot give back the delusion I took away."

"What, then, should I do?"

"The trouble," said the psychiatrist, "lies with his dreams. They are the root cause of his delusions. Take away the glamor-filled dream, and he will recognize the facts."

With that he gave her dream-inhibiting pills that she persuaded her husband to take. From that time on, he became normal.

33. ADAM'S SIN

A biblical scholar spent much of his time reading the Scriptures. As the years passed, he began to form certain fixed notions that grew upon him. For example, all the evils that befell the world and all the misfortunes that had ever vexed him he blamed on Adam.

"If only Adam hadn't been disobedient in the Garden of Eden, we would all be enjoying the felicities of pristine bliss. All the multitudinous calamities that have plagued mankind over the centuries spring from that fateful transgression of Adam. That was the cause of which all else is an effect."

Thus he muttered to himself day after day. He seemed to feel that he had the answer to all man's problems, for it served to explain everything. Whenever anyone brought up any issue that affected the human race, he would be sure to declare emphatically, "If Adam hadn't transgressed, all would be different." No one ever argued with him about this point, so he took it for granted that he was right.

After many years the scholar found himself on a bed of pain, facing his last moments on Earth.

At this critical juncture Adam appeared before him.

"I am Adam," said the apparition, "the one who was disobedient in the Garden of Eden."

The scholar gathered what little strength remained to him, raised himself on his elbows, and said severely, "Yes, and you are responsible for the swarm of woes that have afflicted the human race down the recurring centuries. You are the cause...."

Adam interrupted him. "I transgressed but once," he said softly. "How many times have you?"

The scholar fell back speechless on his bed. Then he muttered, "You have destroyed the central argument that undergirded my view of life."

"Be glad you are leaving it behind," Adam answered.

34. WEALTH AND POVERTY

A hermit had two disciples with opposite problems. One was rich, and the other, poor. Each one declared that his progress was impeded by circumstances.

"Very well," said the hermit, "since one of you has problems connected with wealth, and the other, with poverty, I suggest that you exchange places for a year."

And so it was done. The poor disciple assumed all the duties and responsibilities of the rich one, and vice versa.

At the end of a year the hermit asked them what they had learned.

"I never knew that riches could be such a burden," the poor disciple

declared. "The temptations to waste time on unessential matters multiplied when I had ample wealth to gratify every whim. Then, too, all sorts of people seemed interested in persuading me to waste my resources. I had to learn how to protect myself from them. All in all, I was in such a whirl that I had little opportunity to make spiritual progress."

The rich disciple had a different complaint. "I had to live in very straitened circumstances," he said. "Most of my time was spent in eking out a meager existence. The burden of poverty weighed heavily upon me, and I had little leisure in which to study or to meditate. The fruit of my year's work was therefore rather scant. Most of my time was spent in providing for purely material needs."

Then the hermit spoke. "It is often believed that the substitution of wealth for poverty will lead to greater spiritual progress, but you have proved this belief untenable. The larger problem lies in those who possess wealth or experience poverty, not in the attendant conditions. Spiritual progress is made in spite of circumstances, not because of them."

35. CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

A teacher of metaphysics was once approached by a student who said, "I'm all at sea. I don't know what I should do with my life. Everything is confused. What am I supposed to be gaining from my studies, and how am I supposed to apply them? It's all very uncertain in my mind."

"Have patience," counseled the teacher, "and continue your studies."

At the end of a year, the student came to the teacher again and said, "Now I know what I'm supposed to do."

"And what is that?"

"I'm supposed to climb the mountain," said the student. "That much I know, but I don't know how to do it."

The teacher nodded. "Continue your studies and you will be able to shed more light on the problem."

Another year passed, and the student once again spoke to the teacher.

"I know that I am supposed to climb the mountain," he said, "and I know how I'm supposed to do it."

"Then your problem is solved, is it not?" asked the teacher.

"Not quite," replied the student. "To tell the truth, I don't want to climb the mountain. It's very comfortable in the valley where I'm sheltered from the bitter winds that blow at higher altitudes. When I think of struggling up the cragged mountainside along winding paths to dizzying heights, I lose courage. The slopes are steep, precipices yawn, boulders impede the path. It's so much nicer in the valley where I don't have to grapple with such problems."

"Your first problem involved ignorance," said the teacher, "but your present one, will. Let me warn you, however, that if you choose to stay in the

valley, you do not escape danger. Avalanches and floods are ever-present threats. The dweller in the valley does not escape danger, but the climber of the heights hears the song of the stars in the loftier altitudes of silence."

36. THE STORY OF A REED

I am a simple reed, living on the edge of a river. For longer than I can tell, I stood there, waving in the wind and emitting a low sigh whenever it blew upon me. Before me I saw the ever-moving waters of the river, glinting in the sunlight, and flowing onward to an unknown destination. Life was very agreeable and leisurely during this period. I spent most of my time looking at the sea and sky, and responding in my own fashion to the capricious wind.

One day something drastic happened to me. A man came with a knife and cut me in two. What an amputation that was. For many a day thereafter I felt bruised and maimed.

The man performed an interesting operation on me, cutting away at one end of me to form a sharp point. Then he dipped me into a kind of black water and traced all sorts of interesting characters with me on a white substance called paper.

In this manner I was transformed from a common reed into a word-inscribing pen. I had never in my wildest dreams imagined that I could be used for such an unusual purpose. What an amazing assortment of ideas flowed from my tip onto the blank paper — and how people concentrated on the results of my handiwork! I had achieved a new position of importance in life. Through me the will, aspiration, and intellect of man found expression in writing.

One day, as I was being smoothly guided along the paper by the hand of my master, he came to an abrupt stop. In the ensuing pause, I heard him say, "I, too, am a reed fulfilling a higher will, writing a paragraph in the great Book of Life." I did not, of course, know what he meant, for how could a man be compared to a reed? However, I did accept the comparison as a compliment.

37. A BRICK IN THE CATHEDRAL WALL

"I have been asked to tell my story," said a solid, rectangular brick, "in the hope that it may be of value, but what it really proves I am at a loss to say."

"At first I was nothing but a mass of common clay, of little use to anyone, for the flowers avoided me. One day a few workmen came and took me away. I was placed into a rectangular mold, put into a kiln, and baked. You cannot even imagine how I sweated in the terrible heat. I thought it was the end of me, yet I not only survived, but grew stronger. I came out of this

fiery experience as a brick, red in color, having sharp edges and a rectangular form."

"I had emerged from the gray clay, but I still didn't understand of what use I could be in the world. Various people came to look at me and spoke of schoolhouses, government buildings, and banks, but I didn't know what they were talking about."

"Finally a gentlemen came who said I could be of use in building a cathedral. I thought the prospect was thrilling, but I wasn't sure what my role would be."

"I was taken away and brought to a site where much activity was going on. The workmen took me, covered me with some kind of binding substance, and fitted me into a great wall of the cathedral they were constructing."

"Here I sit both day and night, part of a vast structure dedicated to the glory of God, ruminating on my past. As clay, I was part of an indiscriminate mass. As a brick I was conscious of my separateness from others. Now I am part of a greater whole, fulfilling the intention of a learned architect and supporting a spiritual edifice. Would that my story could be brought to the attention of other bricks that have not yet discovered their purpose and of clay that hasn't yet been molded."

38. REQUEST FOR HELP

A traveler was trudging a dusty road on his way to the White City. After a time he came to a rather desolate region and did not know how to proceed. Nearby, however, he saw a little hut and went there to inquire the way.

A hermit replied to his knock.

"What do you seek?" inquired the recluse.

"I need your help," said the traveler. "Tell me the quickest way to the White City."

The hermit paused, and then asked, "Do you want me to help you as you wish to be helped or as you should be helped?"

"That's a strange question," returned the traveler, "but I'll answer it the way most people do. Help me as I wish to be helped."

"Very well, then," said the hermit. "The quickest way is to follow this road straight across yonder mountain."

The traveler resumed his journey. A short time later he was beset by thieves, beaten fiercely, and left for dead.

There would have been no hope for him if the hermit hadn't appeared and brought the half-lifeless traveler back to his hut. When the latter had recovered somewhat, the two men discussed what had happened.

"You asked me for the quickest way," said the hermit, "and I told you. I knew, of course, that brigands and thieves frequented this region and that you would endanger your life if you ventured there."

"Then why did you advise me to place myself in jeopardy?"

"I helped you as you wished to be helped," replied the hermit. "This was your own choice. My advice would have been different had you requested to know how you ought to be helped."

39. THE LION AND THE UNICORN

Little has ever been recorded of the mighty combat that raged at the foot of the mountain when the ferocious lion fought with the agile unicorn. A river was diverted from its course, trees were uprooted, and even part of the mountain was displaced in the struggle.

As to the cause of this gigantic conflict, there are various theories. However, it seems that the lion wished to be supreme ruler of the plain and insisted that the unicorn be confined to the mountain. When they couldn't agree, the grand conflict began.

For three days and nights the battle raged with unprecedented fury. Many a time the lion flung its huge clawed paws against its opponent only to strike the empty air. The horn of the unicorn was as sharp as a sword, and time and again it gashed the lion's skin, drawing blood so hot that it foamed on being exposed to the air. Whenever this happened, the roar of the lion could be heard for miles around. The unicorn, on the other hand, made no sound, but advanced and retreated so swiftly that the eye could scarcely follow its nimble movements.

It is conjectural how long this contest would have continued had not the unicorn succeeded by a deft thrust of its horn in piercing the eye of the king of beasts. What an agonizing roar arose when that occurred! The very sound loosened boulders from their fixed positions and caused them to hurtle down the slopes.

In blind fury the lion bellowed forth its anger and frustration, but with the loss of sight, it could no longer see its antagonist. At that point the unicorn charged and pierced the very heart of the attacking lion. Thus the battle ended, and the king of beasts lay writhing on the ground, its nostrils spouting columns of foam.

What was proved by this mighty encounter? A sage tells us it symbolized the victory of the spiritual will over the self-assertive personality, and that the tale is told of everyman, who bears within himself a replica of the aggressive lion and the noble unicorn.

40. DREAM OF A SNOWFLAKE

Few people know that snowflakes emit tiny sounds that, when scientifically magnified, yield the equivalent of speech. What these small patterns say as they materialize out of the air and cover the Earth holds special interest

for all persons who study natural phenomena.

The thoughts of a snowflake that fell in the Rocky Mountains on the very first day of this year have been recorded for us by scientific instruments of the rarest delicacy. We have not yet reached the stage where we can converse with such units of snow, but that may come in time. Let us listen to the snowflake's account of its journey to Earth.

"I was once a common drop of water that had high aspirations — so high that I rose in consciousness to the sky and found myself floating on a cloud. At that altitude, far from the hurly-burly of earthly activities, life is very calm and serene. Looking down, I saw the multitudes that populate the Earth, moving hither and yon, wrapped up in their usual small endeavors, unaware of the wider world of Space that stretches out illimitably beyond them. I longed to make them aware that they lived in a universe that was patterned and beautiful and that the wonder of its greatness is concealed in the tiniest things."

"And so I began my pilgrimage from cloud to Earth, and on the way I consulted the icy wind that transformed me from a droplet into a hexagonal snowflake of pure whiteness. On a cushion of air I slid downward. Softly I landed, making no sound as I alighted. Here I was, a presented symbol, changing the very color of the world by my presence. What human being, seeing me, could refrain from comprehending that the ultimate pattern is beauty, and all of Earth's variegated colors are summed up in the pristine unity of whiteness? It has been said that I impede the activities of men, and it is true, but I do so to remind them that there is nothing more important to contemplate than the wonder and beauty that fall gratuitously from Heaven to Earth."

41. HEARING THOUGHTS

For several years I have been taking a home course of study in the art of improving my sensitivity. Recently I realized that my persistent endeavors were producing changes in my capacity to hear. While I attended social gatherings, I began to be aware of strange little sounds that no one else noticed. It dawned on me finally that I was hearing the thoughts that bobbed up and down in people's heads when they spoke or pondered.

At first I was greatly startled, but I soon became used to this phenomenon. After more careful study, I began to draw conclusions about people in accordance with the sounds their thoughts emitted.

The first observation I made was that people who meet on social occasions have thoughts that rattle in their heads as though a handful of pebbles were being dropped on a sheet of tin. This noise is continuous and seems to be a general characteristic of those who frequent cocktail parties.

The people who enjoy rock music, I have noted, themselves emit a kind of periodic thumping sound. It is very insistent and assertive and tends to

drown out the gentler rhythms of a reflective person.

A noble thought produces the effect of musical chimes. It vibrates in the air with a gentle, tinkling sound.

The confused ideas of a person who is angry are dissonant and disagreeable. They sound like the squeaking of a rusty hinge.

A politician's discourse reminds me of dripping water from a leaky faucet.

When the soul drops a thought into the mind, the idea falls softly like a snowflake and emits a gentle musical note. This phenomenon I have witnessed rather rarely, and therefore I speak under correction.

An interesting prospect opens up if this tendency to hear thought-sounds becomes more general. It will provide a new means of evaluation. Today we weigh words, but tomorrow, thoughts. When that happens, we may make wiser choices.

42. THE WEIGHT OF THOUGHT

It has now been scientifically established that thoughts have weight. This major discovery has been proved in the laboratory, but the evidence has not yet been made available to the general public. The most delicate apparatus had to be used, for thought is even more insubstantial than the atom. Neither the human eye nor the microscope has ever been able to register the weight of an idea. The first effect of this discovery is to convince scientists that thought, because it is measurable in the laboratory, really exists.

Interesting problems arose as the experimenters pursued their research. They discovered that there are many gradations of thought — some of it being gross and coarse while other specimens are so rarefied that they are almost impalpable.

The investigators started by isolating gross thought. They found a perfect specimen in the cerebration of a man who was addicted to profanity and couldn't stop swearing from morning until night. So gross was his thought that they were able to determine its actual weight.

It has also been learned that many people do not emit thoughts of any kind. Their various responses are humming sounds resembling escaping steam.

The hardest specimens for the scientists to find were refined or elevated in thought. Fewer people than is believed demonstrate this type of cerebration.

The next great goal to which the investigators are looking forward is a determination of the weight of the soul. They still cherish the hope that such a discovery will result in the betterment of the human race, for if people become aware that this rare essence exists, they may cease to act as though it did not.

Such great achievements augur well for the future. How changed the world would be if thought and soul became as acceptable to the human race as money and liquor.

43. TWO GARDENS

"In the beginning," said a horticulturist, "God planted a garden."

"That may be true," responded a scholar of the Scriptures, "but he really planted two gardens."

"How so?" questioned the horticulturist.

"The first was, of course, the Garden of Eden," explained the scholar, "but the second was planted in the heart of Adam. The latter was only seeded and required patient care before it could blossom."

"We know the nature of the flowers that grew in the Garden," responded the horticulturist, "but what kinds of blossoms are supposed to develop from the one sown in the heart of Adam?"

"Thus far," said the scholar, "we have seen a good many weeds, but in due time we may also perceive the delicate shoots of various virtues blossom."

"It's taken a long time for that garden to grow, hasn't it?" asked the horticulturist.

"When the seeds are properly watered and the sun of goodwill shines upon them," responded the scholar, "we may look forward to a fragrant blossoming."

44. ALL PROBLEMS ARE METAPHYSICAL

"When I have solved my material problems," confided a young man to a metaphysician, "I shall have time to study metaphysics."

"All problems are metaphysical," countered the metaphysician.

"Riches and poverty are material," protested the young man. "How can you call them metaphysical?"

The other held up a newspaper clipping. "Here is the story of a woman who begged for her bread and lived in great poverty, yet on her death it was discovered that she possessed a fortune of more than half a million dollars. Her problem, quite obviously, was not material, for she was actually very wealthy."

"Wouldn't you call that an exception?"

"There are many records of rich persons with no financial problems who yet took their own lives," replied the metaphysician.

"I'm talking about the problems involved in making a living," the young man said somewhat impatiently. "Surely that is a material matter."

"Making a living," said the metaphysician, is but a part of the overall problem of making a life. All material considerations, so-called, are but the lower octave of far larger metaphysical issues. The activities of the body are manifestations of the invisible will that directs them. The seed is matter, but the life-impulse that causes it to grow is metaphysical. The universe is a material manifestation, but the laws that shape it are metaphysical principles."

"Aren't you being impossibly visionary?"

"Not at all. The vessel molded by the potter assumes its shape in accordance with his will. The arrow shot by an archer is an effect of which he is the cause. The body is a house of which the thinker is the tenant. Which is more important, the habitation or the indweller?"

45. WAITING FOR THE MESSENGER

"Send us a Messenger who will illuminate for us the next chapter of the ever-evolving Book of Revealed Truths," said a man to the Abbot of a monastery. "We await the Revelator."

"Many Messengers have already been sent," the Abbot explained. "The first one forgot the message he was supposed to convey. The second found it more agreeable to tell people what they wanted to hear. The third substituted his own theories for the prescribed truths. The fourth was afraid to express convictions that opposed vested interests. The fifth was imprisoned as soon as he began his mission. The sixth delivered the message, but it was brushed aside and characterized as 'nothing new.' The seventh was ignored and died in complete obscurity."

"If that is so," said the man despairingly, "what can be done for the human race?"

"Fear not," counseled the Abbot, "for the Message has been written in the world of everyday life in the form of symbols. It is written on the sky in the effulgence of light. Look for it in the snow-capped mountains that are enfolded by clouds. Look for it in the gently falling snowflake and the many-hued rainbow. Look for it in the flowers that thrust their chalices upward toward the splendor of the sun."

46. MUCH AND LITTLE

"Scientists have learned to measure the varied phenomena of nature," said a disciple to a sage. "Temperature can be accurately determined by a thermometer, the speed of the wind, by an anemometer, the flow of an electric current, by a galvanometer, but how can we measure a man?"

"I shall provide you with two case histories," said the sage, "and let you draw your own conclusions."

"Very well," answered the disciple.

"An actor who accumulated a fortune in his heydey," said the sage, "spent all of it and died in poverty."

"He made little out of much," replied the disciple. "Much was given, but it was soon squandered."

"Let me give you another example," the sage continued. "A ragpicker,

who laboriously rummaged among discarded objects, became rich and died in affluence."

"Out of little, he made much," commented the disciple. "Rubbish brought him riches."

"Here, then," said the sage, "you have the measure of a man. Some persons make little out of much, and others, much out of little. Such a yardstick is helpful in evaluating human achievement."

47. PHENOMENOLOGY OF AN ONION

The humble onion has a history that is known only to connoisseurs.

When first discovered, this vegetable produced a variety of dissenting views.

One school of thought was philosophical. Its adherents were impressed by the fact that onions grow under the ground, that is, in the dark — similarly to man who develops in ignorance, a different kind of darkness. It was noted, too, that a raw onion causes a person to cry, but that a cooked one does not — a clear symbol that raw experience can be vexatious, but that the fire of wisdom transforms it into nourishment.

A second school of thought was more materialistic. It asserted that the value of an onion is summed up in the eating. Rejecting all philosophical considerations, the followers of this school were called advocates of the stomach, for they asserted that eating and taste are the ultimate values. This doctrine proved to be so popular that it is readily acceptable to this very day.

Then there were the onion peelers. They were remarkable scientists who took the onion apart layer by layer in an effort to discover its real nature. Upon reaching the center they found nothing. This demonstrable fact made them very sceptical. They were called "onion peelers" because they applied the same technique in other matters and always came to the conclusion that there was nothing at the center — either of man or of the universe. They believed that every problem had layers, just as does the onion, and that the methodology to be used is to strip them off one by one until nothing remained — and then the problem is solved.

Finally there were those who held that the onion was but the outer husk of a life principle that could not be seen with the human eye. These persons were looked upon as impossible visionaries.

Of course, some people still believe that the only thing to do with an onion is to eat it, but our forefathers knew better.

48. PROTECTING THE TREASURE

In the beginning, the Creator made the animals but did not confer on

them any means of protective self-defense. Realizing how vulnerable they were, they lodged a protest. A representative dog went to the Creator and spoke for the animal kingdom.

"We animals are deeply disturbed," said the dog, "because you have given us the treasure of life, but not the means with which to defend it."

"If I provide you with weapons," the Creator answered, "strife of every description will ensue. They will not be used only in self-defense, but for aggressive purposes."

"The whole animal kingdom nevertheless pleads with you to equip us with weapons."

"Very well," said the Creator with evident reluctance, "it shall be done."

Thereupon he distributed an assortment of strange gifts among the various animals. To the snake, he gave venom; to the lion, a mighty roar; to the tiger, sharp claws; to the dog, a fierce bark; to the wolf, deadly fangs; to the skunk, a repellent odor; to the bull, horns. Some animals, however, like the sheep, were left in their original defenseless condition.

When man realized what had been done, he became troubled and appeared before the Creator.

"You have armed the beasts," declared the man, "but left human beings vulnerable. How can man survive if the animals are stronger, swifter, and better equipped with built-in weapons?"

"They have said that they must guard the treasure of life."

"But aren't you giving them an enormous advantage over us men?"

"A greater treasure than physical life has been granted to you," replied the Creator.

"Really?" questioned the other. "Somehow I hadn't realized that. What is it?"

"You guard the treasure for which the Earth has no name," responded the Creator. "In the fullness of time, it will be revealed to you. Your task is but secondarily to protect your life. It is your inner and immaterial treasure that you must guard — and no outer weapons will be adequate for that purpose."

49. REFLECTIONS OF A MIRROR

I am a mirror — and therefore I am devoted to the art of reflection. Whatever is placed before me becomes the theme for my speculations. In my time I have seen many things, but I have not been granted a means for conveying what I have gained from my experience.

Many faces have looked into my revealing depths, but very few, so far as I could tell, have learned anything from what they saw. Vainly have I sought to convey that what they see in me is unreal and insubstantial. They imagine that they behold themselves, but my entire world is one of shadowy images.

I am often made aware of my limitations, for I am able to reflect physical things only. Would that I could present an image of what takes place in the hearts and minds of men. What a service I could render were it possible for me to make manifest the dark intention that finds expression in fair and flattering words, or the worm of hypocrisy that crawls in glowing promises. A superior kind of mirror is necessary that shows the innumerable guises in which evil masquerades as good.

My world is that of effects. What happens in my depths is but a response to that which takes place in a dimension outside me. How I would like to be the cause of effects instead of the effect of causes — but this may not be.

50. THE HUMAN RACE

I am the human race — the One Humanity.

For untold ages I have been restlessly wandering over the face of the Earth, struggling for survival, contending with nature, warring on countless battlefields.

I have built mighty empires and watched them decay. Ever dying, and forever being born again, I have persisted. Before the Great Flood was, I am, and I still go on today.

Across the world I have traveled, building cities, cutting down forests, planting the plains with grain. Churches, theatres, schools, courts of justice, taverns — all these monuments I have left as a signature of my incessant activity.

I have drenched the Earth with the blood of warring soldiers, fighting for straws and a fistful of gold. The One Earth I have divided into isolated plots, always fractionizing the whole by building separating walls and calling them boundaries. Fighting nature as well as endless civil wars, I have never found sufficient time to fight the inner battle that would establish mastery over the inner self.

My accomplishments have been many. I have built ships to cross the oceans, railroads to bind together continents, and airplanes to span the globe. By means of radio, telegraphy, and television, I have abridged time and space. I have harnessed electricity to drive the machines of industry. With nuclear power I can now destroy the entire world and all the living creatures that populate it.

I am the mother of science, philosophy, art, and religion. Books of every description fill my libraries. In every age I have produced dreamers, thinkers, poets, mystics, prophets, creators who have sought to explain the meaning of my sojourn in time and space.

Always I move onward to the unknown future, each age revealing but a facet of my secret purpose. What it may be is only dimly apprehended by the units of which I am composed. That secret is concealed in the stars and published by the sun, yet it remains hidden and recondite. When the glory of

that purpose is comprehended by the inner vision, even imaginatively, a new day and a new age will dawn.

In the meantime, through fog and mist, I move on the dimly lit path to the rhythm of destiny's muffled drums.

51. UPLIFTMENT

A Holy Man was walking through a bazaar, where merchants and buyers were haggling over prices. After a time he came upon a small group of people who were disputing among themselves. One of them, seeing the Holy Man passing by, called to him.

"Help us resolve a problem, O Sapient One," cried a disputant.

The Holy Man paused, and the wranglers became quiet.

"We have been discussing upliftment," continued the disputant. "Here is one person who says he finds exaltation in a bottle of wine, and another who achieves it by the use of drugs."

"The fermented grape lifts me out of myself," said the winebibber. "Didn't Dionysus commend its use?"

"Drugs expand my mind and bring me a new vision of life," chimed in another of the disputants.

The Holy Man asked, "And are these desirable results achieved with or without effort?"

"Why, without any effort whatsoever," the winebibber cried. "That's the remarkable advantage."

"Woe unto you who have mistaken the symbol for the actuality," replied the Holy Man. "The physical is the lowest octave of reality. To live at this level is to deny the higher forms of expression. Herein lies your materialism."

"You speak hard words," commented the winebibber.

"So does Life," observed the Holy Man. "You are content to be slaves of desire when you might be masters. You crawl when you might fly. You mistake a grasshopper's chirp for the music of the spheres. Love, Beauty, and Truth are intoxicants of a higher order. Ecstasy is not encapsulated in a pill, nor are the higher worlds imprisoned in a bottle of wine."

As the Holy Man spoke, his hearers became quiet and soon melted away into the passing crowd.

52. CURING EFFECTS

A girl who was employed as a secretary found that the pressures imposed by her duties became so great that she developed the habit of overeating. Morning, noon, and night she stuffed herself with food. In time she became

overweight, but she still could not refrain from eating. Disturbed by this state of affairs, she went to a psychiatrist and explained the nature of her problem.

"That condition can be easily remedied," the psychiatrist assured her. "If you will permit me to hypnotize you, I shall suggest to your subconscious that you give up the habit of incessant eating."

At first she demurred, but finally consented.

The psychiatrist did as he had said, hypnotized her, and told her to stop eating excessively.

She responded very well, and the constant craving for food left her. However, she began to develop a new habit, namely, that of drinking. In the morning and in the evening, she filled a glass with strong liquor. As time went on, she began to take a bottle with her to work. Soon she became a problem in the office where she worked and was threatened with dismissal.

For a second time she appeared before the psychiatrist. This time her problem revolved about excessive drinking.

Once again the psychiatrist suggested the same remedy. While she was under hypnosis, he ordered her to give up the habit of imbibing intoxicating beverages.

She responded well and became a teetotaler — but she contracted another unpleasant habit. She developed an uncontrollable craving to bite her fingernails. It was not long before her hands were an unsightly mass of sores.

Again she went to the psychiatrist, and again he proposed the same treatment. He cured her of the tendency to bite her nails, but she then developed the irresistible habit of using foul language in all company and at all times.

Finally she went to a minister and told him her multiple tale of woe.

"Like a great many people," he said, after listening for some time, "you wish to rid yourself of effects without considering causes. Rearranging symptoms will not cure you. Remove the inner blemish and the outer fault will vanish."

53. CONVERSATION WITH THINGS

Discussing his theories with a friend, a poet said, "We limit ourselves greatly by conversing with human beings only."

This statement puzzled his friend. "Can you hold a conversation with anything else but a human being?" he asked.

"Of course," replied the poet. "I do it all the time. As a matter of fact, conversations with human beings are remarkably unsatisfactory and insipid. Most discussions center about trivia, and I find that I am misunderstood no matter how plainly I speak."

"Can you give me examples of conversations with someone other than a human being?"

"Willingly," answered the poet. "The other night I saw a wondrous star in the heavens, and I said, 'Why do you hide from me by day?' It replied, 'I

am always here. You blame me for your own failure to perceive me.'"

"Can you cite another instance?"

"As I was walking yesterday," the poet explained, "I came upon a rosebush. The fragrance was most agreeable. I said, 'Would that human beings could learn to diffuse so pleasant an aroma.' The rosebush replied, 'I was made for this purpose, but human beings don't seem to know why they've been created. I wonder why you don't make an attempt to find out. Just think of what you could do if you discovered your purpose.'"

"It must be mind-expanding to learn how to converse with things as well as people."

"It's very stimulating to the imagination," the poet declared. "I remember saying to a butterfly that alighted on a bush outside my window, 'Why is it that man is rooted to the ground while you, an ordinary butterfly, can glide gracefully through the air?' The insect responded by saying, 'I, too, once crawled on the Earth, but I reshaped myself in a new image and can now fly. You might do the same if you were willing to endure the pains of transformation.'"

54. MASQUERADE

A motley group of people came to the Masquerade Party. A clown, a tramp, a pirate, a princess, a Chinese mandarin, a Queen of Hearts — all thronged the ballroom. Historical characters were also present. One was dressed like Napoleon, another, like Shakespeare, a third, like Julius Caesar, and a fourth, like Torquemada. The buzz of conversation and the strains of music filled the air while the revelers moved to and fro.

At the stroke of midnight the music ceased and the resonant voice of the Master of Ceremonies rang out, "Remove your masks and reveal who you are."

"How can we reveal who we are when we have never known ourselves?" asked the clown.

"Shall we exchange one mask for another?" queried the Chinese mandarin.

"What we really are would affright the world," observed Torquemada gloomily.

"Wiser were it," said Shakespeare, "if we could reveal what we ought to be."

"Here is a woman," cried Napoleon, pointing to his partner, "who has amnesia and knows not who she is."

"All of us suffer spiritual amnesia," commented Julius Caesar. "It is a common ailment."

A moment's pause ensued, and then the voice of the Master of Ceremonies was again heard. "In that case, keep your masks on and go your way, for no one will ever notice the difference."

55. OF SPARKS AND SUNS

A sage was asked to speak about the Lighted Way that must be trodden by the one who journeys toward the golden-hearted Dawn.

"There are sparks, matches, candles, lamps, and sun," declared the sage. "Sparks are evanescent; matches burn briefly, but they may set combustible substances aflame; candles give steady light, but they may be blown out by a strong gust of wind; lamps are protected from sudden blasts and are therefore constant; suns and stars are sources of illumination that light up the universe."

"Choose, then, which you would be."

"Some persons are sparks, gleaming in the dark like fireflies."

"Others are like matches that burn for a brief moment but are soon extinguished."

"Still others are candles, radiating streams of path-defining light, but they may be blown out by the adverse winds of fortune."

"And again, there are those who act like lamps set in a dark place that reveal a pathway in the night of earthly life."

"Finally, there are suns and stars whose light is a perpetual dawn before which shadows flee and darkness is dispersed."

"Herein lies opportunity and choice. Which do we wish to become? Shall we be unlit candles, ephemeral sparks, or incandescent suns?"

56. THE GREAT COMPANIONS

A young man came to an astrologer with a tale of frustration.

"Nobody understands me," the young man declared, "and I feel isolated and alienated. When fortune frowns on me, there is no one to whom I can go for an encouraging word. As far as I'm concerned, the world is a wilderness, and I can find no companions in my loneliness."

"You are looking for trustworthy friends in the wrong place," commented the astrologer.

"What do you mean by that?" the young man asked. "I have searched everywhere without success. No one cares what becomes of me."

"No one on Earth, perhaps," observed the astrologer, "but you haven't searched the heavens."

"The heavens!" exclaimed the young man. "What can anyone find there?"

"My best friends," said the astrologer, "are lodged in the very depths of space. They shine on me with undiminished vigor day after day. Their light is always reassuring, and they never complain. Oftentimes I confide my secret dreams to them, and they always encourage me to do better."

"Are you saying that the stars and planets are your companions?" queried the young man somewhat incredulously.

"Precisely," answered the astrologer. "Mercury is shrewd and sagacious; Mars, courageous and bold; Saturn, cautious and prudent; Neptune, idealistic and visionary; Venus, charming and companionable; Jupiter, regal and expansive. I have had many conversations with all of them and have been greatly enriched by their counsel."

"But I'm looking for companions on Earth," the young man said in bewilderment.

"That's why you're having so much trouble," the astrologer pointed out. "Why prescribe where the Great Companions should be found? I have often listened to Hercules recount his labors, and Perseus describe his encounter with the Medusa. Sirius has delightful vibrations, and the Big Dipper never fails to stir me to a sense of awe and wonder. I am moved by the sweetness of the Pleiades and inspired by the mighty hunter, Orion."

"How is it that they have never spoken to me that way?" the young man inquired.

"They're very polite," explained the astrologer, "and never speak first. Unless you address them properly, they maintain a well-bred silence."

"What you're really saying is that I should invoke the gods," said the young man.

"I prefer to call it a matter of learning the alphabet of light," replied the astrologer.

57. THE POLE OF IMMUTABILITY

It has been said that a king asked his counsellors to formulate a statement that would be true now and in all the ages to come.

After much deliberation, they presented to him the declaration, "This, too, shall pass away."

At first the king was satisfied, but after a time questions of different kinds entered his mind. One day he shared his doubts with a sage.

"It is technically correct that change is the law of life," said the king, "but it is really not particularly satisfying to know that the Wheel of Life forever turns."

"Your dissatisfaction is justified," responded the sage, "because the statement provided by your counsellors applies primarily to the plane of mutability. Impermanence, however, must rest on permanence, and the changeable on that which is changeless."

"If that be so," said the king, "provide me with a statement that complements the one my counsellors gave me."

"The many change, but the One remains," responded the sage. "On the plane of earthly things, it is correct to say, 'This, too, shall pass away,' but on the plane of the spirit, everything changeable moves about the pole of immutability."

"Can you sum up what you have said?" asked the king.

"I am the eternal," declared the sage.

58. HUMAN EQUIVALENTS

A scientist and a metaphysician engaged in a discussion.

"At a time when science is making such remarkable discoveries," the scientist asserted, "I can't see why anyone should study metaphysics."

"To which discoveries do you refer?" questioned the metaphysician.

"Radioactivity, for example, was discovered early in this century."

"True," commented the metaphysician, "but when will you teach human beings to be radioactive?"

The scientist turned the discussion into another channel. "What about the airplane?"

"You have learned to offset the gravitational pull of Earth," conceded the metaphysician, "and to fly through the trackless air. When will you succeed in enabling man to offset the earthward urge of instinct that prevents him from soaring in the world of ideas?"

"Radio and television are certainly remarkable contributions to man's progress," the scientist mused, a little less aggressively.

"You have indeed multiplied sound," the metaphysician acknowledged, "but where is the Word that enlightens, the sound that sings in the heart? All that you have achieved with regard to nature is of little value if it is not duplicated at a higher level in human nature."

"Well, then," the scientist said with a slight hint of exasperation, "you must admit that the splitting of the atom is a remarkable achievement of the age."

"No doubt it is," the metaphysician nodded, "and yet its human implications are universally neglected. If a few square inches of matter can yield an incredible supply of light and energy, what a vast potential must lie locked up in man. When he begins to emit an equivalent degree of light, a better future for the human race will be assured, but not till then."

"Why do you refer everything to human beings?" asked the scientist somewhat crossly.

"Unless your discoveries improve men," replied the metaphysician, "they are but curiosities. Science is a fine servant, but a poor master. Man is the measure. If you do not improve him, he will use your discoveries to destroy the planet."

The scientist disagreed — and there the discussion ended.

59. TRANSFORMATION

An alchemist who had entered a pawnshop was soon engaged in a con-

versation with the pawnbroker. Their discussion turned to alchemy.

"Your belief that the baser elements in man can be refined and transmuted has always struck me as impractical, not to say, visionary," observed the pawnbroker.

At this point an old man entered the shop and placed a sword on the counter, saying, "What is it worth to you?"

The pawnbroker cast a critically appraising eye at the article. Holding it up for examination, he said, "This old sword is made of poor steel, for it is nicked in several places. It's really quite worthless, but I'll give you two dollars for it just as a favor."

The old man accepted the offer and soon hobbled out of the store, pocketing the money.

Some time later, another man entered the shop to buy a sword.

With alacrity the pawnbroker picked up the weapon that the old man had just left and held it up for inspection.

"Here you have a precious heirloom," declared the pawnbroker, "that would grace any museum in the country. I shall part with it very reluctantly for fifty dollars."

The man bought the sword and proudly strode out of the shop.

The alchemist, having observed these transactions, commented, "You may disbelieve in alchemy, but you certainly practice it. You have alchemized a sword that you bought for two dollars into a museum piece worth fifty dollars."

"True," admitted the pawnbroker, "but that's simply business."

"If you can transform a worthless sword by the power of your imagination, might it not be possible to transfigure human nature?"

60. DISTANCE

At a symposium, a discussion arose regarding how distance is measured.

"Inches, feet, miles, or meters, it is obvious," said a physicist, "are the approved measures of distance. This is demonstrated daily in our laboratories."

"In my field," said an astronomer, "Distance is measured in terms of light years."

"I don't agree," countered a psychologist. "The distance between two persons, psychologically speaking, should be measured by the difference in wavelengths of understanding."

"The difference between a man and a star," observed an occultist, "lies in the light that they respectively radiate."

"Between man and God," said a mystic, "the distance is measured by aspiration."

A metaphysician had a different view. "Between man and his unfulfilled destiny the distance is measurable in light years that diminish in proportion to the light he generates."

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